Anotated Text Set  
For Rosalie Griffiths  
by Heather Anderson

As teachers who are training students to be positive contributors to a common, hopeful future, there is one issue that ought to stand out to us as a concern that is both particularly common to all people and that poses a significant threat to hope: Environmental sustainability. The need to train students to recognize and act in response to the finite realities of our natural environment from within every discipline has been recognized by the Ontario Ministry of Education who published a document outlining a common approach to this end in 2009 called *Acting Today, Shaping Tomorrow: A Policy Framework*  *for Environmental Education in Ontario Schools.*  
 The Environmental Education policy document leans heavily on a pre-existing recommendation document completed by Roberta Bondar including the following statement about environmental education in Ontario classrooms included in the section devoted to vision:

*“ Ontario’s education system will prepare students with the* ***knowledge, skills, perspectives****, and* ***practice****s they need to be environmentally responsible citizens. Students will understand our fundamental connections to each other and to the world around us through* ***our relationship to******food, water, energy, air, and land, and our interaction with all living things****. The education system will provide opportunities within the classroom and the community for students to engage in actions that deepen this understanding”.*

*Shaping Our Schools, Shaping Our Future, p. 4*

In order to address the dynamics of this network of relationships which forms the basis of Environmental education, English classrooms must provide a wide variety of texts that expose students to the sights, sounds and stories both of environmental interconnectedness and threats to the delicate realities therein as well as texts that inspire students to take a responsible and active role in the development of environmentally sustainable practices.  
 Bombarded by news of environmental crises at home and abroad, Canadian students often suffer one or more of several reactions: mental, emotional and social paralysis brought about by a sense of impending environmental doom,indifference to or annoyance at unwelcome tidings, depression and disengagement, incredulity, anger or vigilantism. Educators must help students to think both critically and realistically about the environmental issues with which we are all faced, directing them to voices of wisdom within our culture and beyond it that can speak to the need for reflection and action in the area of environmental sustainability.

1. **Policy document**

***Acting Today, Shaping Tomorrow: A Policy Framework for Environmental Education in Ontario Schools.***

**Published by The Ontario Ministry of Education.**

**Summary:**

This document outlines Environmental Education in the Ontario classroom in terms of goals, strategies and actions under the headings of Teaching and Learning, Student Engagement and Community Connections and Environmental Leadership.

**Rationale:**

Exposing the students to policy documents includes them in their own educational process, demonstrating transparency on the part of the educator and enabling the student to focus on the goals at hand. While the lack of specificity with regard to methodology laid out in this document could be considered a weakness, inviting students to engage with the text in both a critical and creative way will allow for planning and for the development of detail that will bring life to the general guidelines offered by the text.

1. **Prose**

**Cree Prophecy**

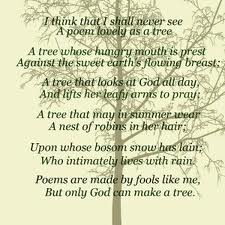
**Summary:**

This is a short but famous saying whose origins are not widely known. It demonstrates the insights of the Cree peoples into the unsustainable practices of European colonists in North America for whom the natural world was primarily comprehended in terms of capital gain.

**Rationale:**

This pithy, haunting saying from North America’s Aboriginal community provides an excellent point of departure for a conversation about Environmental Sustainability as it is both pointed and leaves much to the imagination. Land, air and water, 3 of the 5 environmental elements highlighted in *Acting Today, Shaping Tomorrow* are addressed. The interconnectedness of all living things is evinced by the mention of both trees and animals and by the seamless pairing of the need to breathe with the need to eat. Students could refer back to the elements of this Cree prophecy as they explore both texts specifically linked to environmental sustainability and those that demonstrates attitudes referenced in the text.   
 With over 200 000 members living in Canada, The Cree are one of the largest First Nations groups in Canada. The inclusion of this Cree prophecy within this text set platforms the rich knowledge and oral traditions while introducing a type of text that is likely to be outside the realm of students’ experience.

1. **Poem**



**“Trees”  
by Alfred Joyce Kilmer**

These twelve lines, written in strict iambic tetrameter captures the rhythm and vitality of plant life in the anthropomorphic description of a single tree. Written in The U.S.A in 1913, just before the beginning of The Great War (WWI) in Europe, when so much of the natural landscape would be destroyed by tanks, trenches and artillery shelling, this poem embodies an innocent wonder at the life of a tree that suggests both the artistry and the incomprehensibility of the natural world.

**Rationale:**

*Trees* provides an anthropological and historical link both to Native, Eco-centred spirituality and the industrialism of modernity that suppressed Aboriginal sustainable practices. The **interconnectedness** of plants to soils, fauna and the water cycle are made explicit while the connectedness to humanity is implicit, opening up a discussion on the web of life.

Students could infer whether differences between this poem and the Cree prophecy are indicative of a gradual removal of humanity from the natural world and ask what the roles of Native Spirituality and European religion are on the two world views and the importance of environmental sustainability within each.

Since Kilmer relates the tree to humanity through the imagery of a nursing baby, worship, the wearing of decorative garments and an enjoyment of the natural environment, students could evaluate the effectiveness of a tree as a symbol of ***our interaction with all living thing.*** For example,students could consider how trees, both practically and within the poem, relate to ***our relationship to******food, water, energy, air, and land.*** Supplementary articles explaining Canada’s pulp & paper industry, the role of deforestation in soil erosion, and the CO2 cycle (amongst others) could be used as support. Current logos and other texts could be read with reference to this idea of a tree as a symbol for environmental sustainability with similaries and differences between Kilmer’s characterization being noted.

1.  Song

**Big Yellow Taxi  
by Joni Mitchell**

**Summary:**

Written in 1970 during the singer/songwriter’s trip to Hawaii, Big Yellow Taxi expresses the sense of loss evoked by the development of commercial enterprises on pristine land. The song compares the disappearance of natural spaces and species to the loss of a loved one by describing commercial development, deforestation, the detrimental effects of the pesticide DDT and finally, the flight of the singer’s “old man”. The verses are held together by a refrain that bewails the human tendency to take both people and the natural environment for granted:  
  
*Don't it always seem to go  
That you don't know what you've got til it's gone  
They paved paradise and put up a parking lot*

**Rationale:**

“Big Yellow Taxi”makes obvious links between human convenience and entertainment and the well-being of plant and animal species, referencing unsustainable practices in both **land** (development) and **air** (the spraying of DDT). The **interconnectedness of living things** in made explicit not only through the description of the impact of human actions, but also by the implicit comparison of interpersonal relationships between humans to environmental systems described in the first three verses of the song. The chorus also echoes the word so the Cree Prophecy (2). Like many Cree, Mitchell is Canadian, but students could discuss how Mitchell’s personal context (as a woman of European heritage writing after Woodstock) may have affected her articulation of such a similar observation of human behaviour.  
 Mitchell’s hit was written within a decade of the publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962), an award-wining non-fiction that documented the detrimental effects of pesticides on birds and other species, causing a paradigm shift toward ecological responsibility in both the public mindset and in government legislature. Connecting this song to Carson’s seminal work will help students to understand **how perspectives are changed** when study of natural systems is made of and when advocates speak up about their experience of environmental degradation. The impact of Mitchell’s song in its own right could also be explored by listening to other hit re-recordings such as those of Amy Grant and Counting Crows. Discussions about **perspectives** on and advocacy for environmental sustainability could center on questions like, “Why do you think this song was re-recoded so often? What is it about the format of this piece that makes people pay attention to the content? How could this inform other awareness-raising efforts? Do you think these issues are still relevant? If not, what issues would you write into the song in 2012”?

1. **Non-fiction / Children’s Literature**

**The Lorax  
by Dr. Seuss**

**Summary:**

The Lorax is a small, furry creature that defends the Truffula Trees from the Once-ler, who is determined to harvest Truffula Trees for their raw materials in order to make and sell Thneeds. The Lorax repeatedly warns the Once-ler of his greedy ways, but hen the last Truffula is cut down, the Lorax leaves the Once-ler to his gloomy fate in a barren world.

The Once-ler recounts the story of the Lorax to a young boy and entrusts him with the last Truffula seed and the Lorax’s parting message – “Unless”. The possibilities of both the word and the seed are left in the hands of the reader, since the entire rhyming text is addressed to “you” as instructions of how to find the Once-ler and what he will tell you when you do. The Once-ler realizes in the course of recounting his tale that “Unless” refers to, “Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot”.

**Rationale:**

“The Lorax “platforms the simple **practice** of learning from the last generation, both according to their mistakes and their insights, as an important step in developing sustainable outlook. Both the literal and the symbolic impact of planting a seed **(as both practice and perspective)** could be discussed with students using questions like, “What kinds of species should be planted in our cities and where could we plan them? What is the role of hope when seeking sustainable solutions to environmental degradation”?  
 The Lorax opens a discussion about current unsustainable practices both on **land**, in **water** systems and with regard to **air** quality, since the One-ler’s story begins, “when the grass was still green, and the pond was still wet, and the clouds were still clean, and the songs of the Swamy Swans rang out in space”. The Lorax describes the **interconnectedness** of the species in Seuss’s story as he explains to the Once-ler that his greedy manufacturing processes deplete the Truffula on which some species depend, and pollute the air and water that they all need. **Energy** practices could also be discussed with reference to what kind of energy the Once-ler may have been using and what some of his alternatives would have been, both in 1971 (when the book was published) and now.  
 Being a short work of fiction, The Lorax allows students to engage with the complex themes of environmental sustainability in simple and imaginative way, alleviating some of the anxiety that can be associated with this topic as well as stimulating creative thinking – an asset to any kind of problem solving, including systemic problems associated with practices that are not environmentally sustainable.

1. **Environmental Programming**

**Green Thumbs Growing Kids**467 Parliament St.  
PO Box 82874  
Toronto, ON M5A 3Y2

**Summary:**

The Mission of Green Thumbs Growing Kids is to connect students to their food through hands-on education. To this end, Green Thumbs offers several after-school and summer camps programs, but teachers are also invited to arrange an informational workshop provided by Green Thumbs either in the Allen Gardens green house in Toronto’s East End or in any school yard or classroom. Workshops are connected to specific points of the Ontario Curriculum for any class and focus on an aspect of urban gardening or composting . The aim of all Green Thumbs programs is to give students the knowledge, skills and possibility of producing their own food. Green Thumbs provides an opportunity for students to do so in a supervised setting and provides care for all vegetation planted in school gardens over the summer months. Phase 3 of Gren Thumbs afterschool program is being launches this spring and will offer students an opportunity to consider the impact of their local gardening within a global context.

**Rationale:**

The aims of the *Acting Today, Shaping Tomorrow* cannot be met if students do not acquire practical **skills** in the area of environmental sustainability. While many texts are excellent points of departure for students to build their knowledge and shape their perspective on environmental sustainability or even to consider general practices therein, the best way to develop skills in an area is through living texts – human instruction and hands-on experience. While Dr. Seuss’s “The Lorax” depicts a scenario in which a story related by someone of a previous generation offers a starting point for environmental sustainability departing from past errors, Green Thumbs offers instruction from the point of view of successful practices.  
 As the heart of Canada’s prime farming land is paved over and developed into living and industrial complexes in Southern Ontario, the need to grow not only trees but **food plants** in large cities becomes ever more important. As communities are educated and empowered to create their own food, dependence on industrial monoculture is reduced which signifies a reduction in the possibilities of crop disease and an increase in crop biodiversity which benefits soil and helpful species. Urban gardening also helps to reduce urban heat, an issue for both **plant** and **animal** health as well as **air quality**. Green spaces also prevent pollution and flooding caused by storm run-off, providing porous areas for water absorption and purification where concrete’s impervious surface ushers rainwater on towards the lake, carrying with it all types of debris and pollutants. In this way, urban gardening addresses several areas of specifically environmental concern while also playing a role in issues of **food justice.** Green Thumbs reinvests its produce in healthy lunch programs for kids.

**7. Photographic Exhibit**

**   
*Midway***

**By Chris Jordan**

**Summary:**

This series of 33 shocking photographs was taken in September 2009 on Midway – an isolated island thousands of miles north of Hawaii that is the nesting ground for thousands of Albatross. The images depict the carcasses of baby Albatross as they were found by the photographer, with their stomachs full of the plastic ocean debris that their parents had mistakenly taken for food, foraged and fed to them. This series is part of an evolving body of work including a documentary currently under production about the toll of human activities on the lives of these birds in particular. Jordan’s work overall documents the minutia of consumerism.

**Rationale:**

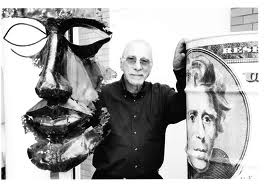
This exhibit demonstrates vividly the extent of the far-reaching effects of human waste upon even one of the most remote places on earth. Since it features a seabird, susceptible to disturbances in the **land, sea** and **air,** the exhibit forces a reflection the **interconnectedness** of these systems. In each photos, the dead Albatross represents s both a legacy of human mismanagement and a poetic justice - - since the decomposing bird has no visible disintegrative impact on the plastic waste that ended its life, it is left behind for human beings to deal with.

Students could discuss the literary implications of these images with regard to the development of a consciousness of environmental sustainability using Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s poem, “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” as a point of comparison and/or supplementary text. The adage, “he has an albatross hung around his neck” indicates an unfortunate burden one is made to carry by others. The term originates from Coleridge’s poem in which the Mariner shoots an Albatross and is then punished by the crew (who believe it to be a bad omen) by being forced to wear the dead bird around his neck. But the Mariner comes to regret his decision not on the basis of his punishment, but because he recognizes that the bird did not deserve to die. This moral epiphany turns the “Great Chain of Being” mentality of the day on its head, since the Mariner comes to sympathize with the bird rather than to see it a servant to his greater, human whims.

Students could discuss how these photographs relate to the relationship between **knowledge** and **perspective,** or how they represent “an Albatross around the neck” both in light of the popular turn of phrase and with reference to the wider implications of Coleridge’s poem. Some questions to examine could be, “How has your perspective on plastic production and/or waste management changed as a result of this **knowledge**? What percentage of people in the world would have access to this **knowledge**? How would these images impact the **perspectives** of various members of our society? Are these images more disheartening than helpful – what can we do with this **knowledge**”?

Midway also provokes questions around the sustainability of human manufacture of plastics in general and how recycling practices could be improved.

**8. Website**

**Oil Drum Art**[***www.oildrumart.org***](http://www.oildrumart.org) **SUMMARY:**

Since being founded as a grassroots collective in New Haven, U.S.A. in 2003, Oil Drum Art (ODA) has sought to raise awareness around America’s dependence upon the petroleum industry with the goal of seeing a decrease in dependence. The project is focused around the transformation of oil drums - either on the surface or by structural manipulation - into works of art that speak to various environmental and economic issues connected with petroleum dependence including climate change, sustainability and the conflict in the Middle East. Works are displayed in exhibitions across the U.S.A. with the aim that they would eventually spread to an international audience. The above image pictures founder and president of ODA, Jim Lardis, between two pieces crafted from oil drums: the one on Lardis’ left is an oversized American $1 bill painted onto a drum while on Lardis’ right sits an empty-eyed visage sculpted from an oil drum**.** The ODA website displays images of works that have been included in these exhibitions, classified under the various subject matter upon which they touch as well cursory information about the role of petroleum energy in the global, 21st century context. The aesthetic goal of Oil Drum Art is to capitalize on the symbolic potential of the oil drum as an image of the last century of economic and social development in the world. The weighty benefits to society that have come about as a result of petroleum-based energy are not ignored in the conversation encouraged by ODA. However, perhaps as the oil drum begins to be understood as a symbol of past success rather than seen as a necessary building block for current realities, the widespread use of more beneficial and clean types of fuel may be fully embraced.

**Rationale:**

This website is an important addition to a set of texts about environmental sustainability because it looks at the issue of energy use which both undergirds much of the environmental debate recommended as a topic about which students should must acquire knowledge, perspective, skills and practices in *Acting Today, Shaping Tomorrow.* Although ODA has set a clear goal to encourage a decrease in the use of petroleum energy it does not provide specific, current information on the role of petroleum energy. In this way, the site distances itself from controversy and makes a purely aesthetic appeal for reflection, recommending the **practice** of careful research and consideration to viewers, assisting students in building **perspective** and to consider how their own or others’ artistic **skills** could be a part of advocacy work for sustainable initiatives.  
 Precisely because the statements made by this site are almost exclusively of an aesthetic nature, through works of art, ODA would be an excellent conversation generation tool.

9. **Newspaper Article**

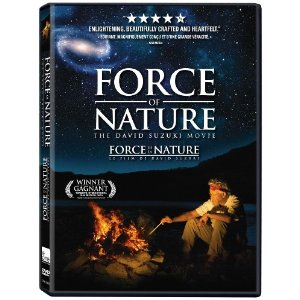
**“Alberta, Ottawa oil lobby formed secret committee”  
by Martin Lukacs for The Toronto Star**[*http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/politics/article/1144579--alberta-ottawa-oil-lobby-formed-secret-committee*](http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/politics/article/1144579--alberta-ottawa-oil-lobby-formed-secret-committee)

**Summary:**

This article, published on March 12 2012, describes how Environmental organizations in Canada have only recently, as a result of an access to information request, become aware of the existence of the “Oil Sands Clean Energy Coordinating Committee” which has existed since early 2010. The article relates that, “The committee brought together the president of the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers (CAPP) with deputy ministers from Natural Resources, Environment Canada, Alberta Energy and Alberta Environment to synchronize their lobbying offensive in the face of mounting protest and looming international regulations targeting the Alberta crude”. One Greenpeace campaigner charged that the committee’s secret existence demonstrates that the government is becoming the advocacy arm of the oil industry while a campaign director of the Indigenous Environmental Network stated that international embarrassment over the environmental and human rights issues associated with the oil sands has elicited the covert actions.   
 A spokesperson for CAPP said that the committee is focused on “basic coordination”. However, government documents record that the group has been referred to as a “steering committee”. The article calls the CECC a “secret government-industry committee” and links its plans to government plans to expant oil sands production three-fold and to the recent stalling under Canadian pressure of the Fuel Quality Directive in Europe, which would discourage the use of petroleum from Canadian oil sands on account of the pollution they produce. While acknowledging that Canadian pressure has been successful in such contexts in the U.S.A. the article also cites the recent refusal of President Obama to approve the Keystone XL pipeline. The article ends by casting doubt on the intentions behind the recent Environment Canada announcement that cooperation with the oil sector will be “strengthened” by assigning a senior official to head up the Canadian Oil Sands Innovation Alliance.

**Rationale:**

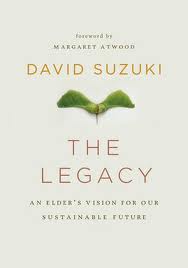
This article provides current information about one of Canada’s largest industries, its environmental impact and the federal and international political debate within which it is entrenched. Specifically, this is a text that speaks to the dominant **energy** system within Canada and the world, but by extrapolation, questions of **air, water and land pollution.** Using this text as a starting point, students can consider and or research what the specific concerns of the voices represented within in might be (CAAP, Greenpeace and The Indigenous Environmental Network for example). The interrelatedness and or interdependence of these groups could also be discussed along with the interrelatedness of the three major economies mentioned in the article: Canada, the U.S.A. and Europe. These questions allow the students to consider the organizational web involved in the development of environmentally sustainable practices and the levels of government and of human activity which are affected.  
 The inclusion of this article in the text set also offers a chance for a stylistic analysis of a newspaper article, which could be useful in preparing for the provincial literary test or practice test (grades 9 & 10) or for the development of media literacy at any grade level. There is a distinct distrust of the federal government and of oil sands industry that surfaces in the article. Students could analyse for stylistic elements that demonstrate this bias and discuss whether it is justified.

**10. Lecture (via documentary & memoir)**

**Force of Nature: The David Suzuki Movie**  
**directed byBronwen Hughes**.

**The Legacy: An Elder’s Vision for our sustainable future.  
by David Suzuki**

**Summary:**

The life and lessons of Canadian icon, David Suzuki are captured in this award winning documentary. Suzuki’s life is chronicled from his family’s internment in Japanese prison camps, his university studies and passionate pursuit of better understanding of and care for the natural environment. The film ends with Suzuki’s *Last Lecture* which was given in 2010 and which Suzuki describes as "a distillation of my life and thoughts, my legacy, what I want to say before I die." The film provides the perspective shaping context behind Suzuki’s life’s work and *Last Lecture*, which details the perspective and habits that people must adopt in order to move toward a truly sustainable future and makes use of video graphics, humour and a spiritual-philosophical appraisal.  
 Suzuki’s Last Lecture is also delivered in Suzuki’s latest novel, *The Legacy* in which he cautions that environmental sustainability must be valued above economic profitability. Suzuki explains that humans must together adopt a holistic point of view en masse at not be content to accept simple scientific explanations in order to develop sustainable practices. This advice is all the more potent in that it comes from a renowned scientist. Finally, Suzuki stresses the need to nurture faith in the “generosity of mother earth” and to exercise imagination in the face of environmental crises.

**Rationale:**

Since students are often exposed to lecture-style lessons in class and need to acquire sharpened lecture skills before heading to university, the study of lecture as text would be beneficial to students’ academic careers. Being that Suzuki is a well-known personality who approaches environmental questions from both a scientific and a spiritual view, there is potential for this lecture to engage large numbers of students.  
 Although Suzuki is more aware than most of the extent to which natural ecosystems are currently stressed by human activity, the tone of his *Last Lecture* is a positive and hopeful one that prioritizes a sense of enduring wonder with respect to the natural world - - a tone that could motivate students to contribute positively to discussion and action around environmental sustainability rather than elicit negative, reactive-type responses to some of the overwhelming information that comes to light when examining specific cases of environmental degradation in Canada and abroad. Suzuki’s life itself is an example of a triumph of human spirit and the benefit of education when addressing these issues.   
 Finally, the David Suzuki Foundation website offers useful resources for teachers in Ontario and every province in most subject areas (including English) that directly link curriculum expectations to the film, Force of Nature.